

The Wetland Overlook Trail in Spring

The Wetland Overlook Trail at Pickering Creek Audubon Center is a year-round treat for nature enthusiasts. As you wander this mile-long path, you'll encounter three viewing platforms, two wetland windows, and a viewing blind, all providing glimpses into the thriving freshwater wetlands. Low to the ground, small numbered posts align with our brochure, showcasing spring's highlights along the trail.

Before you start on your guided hike, take time to notice the large antenna in the parking lot. This is part of the Motus community science program. This automated radio telemetry receiver tracks specially tagged birds, bats, and insects as they migrate through our region. When a tagged animal passes within range, the antenna records its unique ID, contributing to an international database that helps researchers understand migration routes, timing, and survival rates of various species. Pickering Creek is proud to be one of over 1,000 Motus stations worldwide helping scientists unravel the mysteries of animal movement.

The wetlands are coming alive with fresh green growth and colorful wildflowers. The air rings with frog choruses and bird songs as migratory species return. With warming temperatures and longer days, spring is the perfect season to explore the awakening landscape and witness the renewal of life throughout our diverse habitats.



"Every spring is the only spring – a perpetual astonishment."

– Christopher Morley



Key to Wetland Overlook Trail Map Symbols

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------|
| Observation Point | Wetland |
| Herb & Pollinator Garden | Forest |
| Parking | Farm Field |
| Boundary | Field to Forest |
| Wetland Overlook Loop Trail .9 miles | Meadow |
| Farm To Bay Loop Trail 1.8 miles | Water |
| Pond Loop Trail .4 miles | North |
| Meadow Trail | |
| Spur | |

Hours: Pickering Creek is open to the public every day of the week, free of charge. Site hours are from 7am to near dusk, check our website for up to date closing times.

Office hours are Monday-Friday, 9am-5pm.

Pickering Creek Audubon Center conserves natural habitats on Maryland's Eastern Shore by engaging and empowering our community through exploration, education and stewardship.

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Spring

A Seasonal Look at Our Restored Wetlands



Welcome to Pickering Creek

1. Take a moment here to pause,

be still and silent, and take in your surroundings. For the next mile, you will be strolling along the wetland loop, immersing yourself in the springtime splendor of Pickering Creek Audubon Center. Engage your senses to connect with the landscape. Listen for the chorus of spring peepers, their high-pitched calls creating a magical soundtrack. The air is alive with the soft hum of insects, adding to the symphony of the season. Let your eyes be captivated by the rich tapestry of spring colors, including the stunning electric blue of the indigo bunting as it flits between new leaves. Allow the whispers of the wind and the distinctive metallic calls of the glossy ibis with its iridescent plumage to serenade your walk as these elegant wading birds hunt in the shallows.



2. Meadow Habitat Maintenance

Our meadows require periodic mowing to prevent forest succession and maintain diverse habitat for native wildlife. When you see freshly mowed areas, remember this essential conservation practice prevents woody plants from taking over and supports meadow-dependent species. Though recently mowed areas may temporarily appear bare or untidy, nature quickly rebounds. Within weeks, fresh grasses and wildflowers emerge, attracting pollinators, grassland birds, and small mammals. This careful management ensures our meadows continue to flourish as vibrant ecosystems, providing food and shelter for countless species while preserving the open landscape that makes Pickering Creek special.

3. Green Tree Frogs (*Hyla cinerea*)

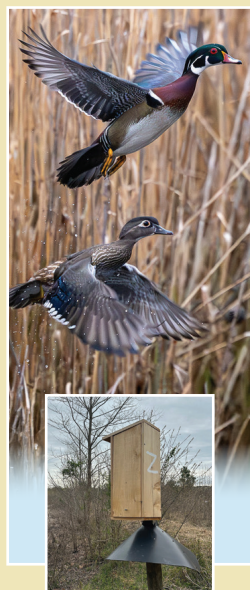
The Green Tree Frog transforms Pickering Creek's spring evenings with its distinctive presence. Though small—rarely exceeding two inches—this vibrant amphibian produces a remarkably powerful call that echoes across wetlands and woodlands. Males emit a nasal “queenk-queenk-queenk” that can be heard from surprising distances as they establish territories and attract mates. Clinging to reeds and shrubs near water with their specialized toe pads, these emerald acrobats begin their chorus in early spring, continuing through warm summer nights. Their amplified calls create a primal soundscape that signals the seasonal renewal of life, offering visitors an unforgettable auditory experience of nature's springtime vitality.



Patrick Carney

4. Wood Duck (*Aix sponsa*) & Bird Boxes

Wood Ducks enchant visitors with their stunning plumage and distinctive calls as they navigate our waterways and forests. These cavity-nesting birds face habitat challenges due to the loss of mature trees with natural hollows. Pickering Creek's dedicated volunteer team addresses this need through our wood duck box program, providing crucial nesting habitat alongside our Eastern Bluebird conservation efforts. Volunteers maintain, clean, and monitor these boxes throughout the spring, documenting occupancy and hatchling success. This hands-on stewardship ensures these colorful waterfowl continue to thrive in our wetlands. The program offers a perfect example of how community action creates immediate, positive impacts for beloved native wildlife species.



Scott Warner Outdoors

5. Yellow Breasted Chat (*Icteria virens*)

The Yellow-breasted Chat announces its spring arrival at Pickering Creek with a theatrical vocal performance unlike any other eastern songbird. This robin-sized warbler sports a brilliant lemon-yellow breast that stands in striking contrast to its olive-green back, white spectacles, and gray head. After wintering in Central America, chats return to establish territories in dense thickets and woodland edges, where males deliver an astonishing repertoire of whistles, cackles, mews, and croaks—often performing at night or during elaborate flight displays. Though secretive by nature, these charismatic birds reveal themselves when singing from exposed perches, their vibrant coloration flashing through the new spring foliage like living sunlight while they contribute their distinctive voice to the season's chorus.



Patrick Carney

6. Glossy Ibis (*Plegadis falcinellus*)

Each spring, the eastern shore of Maryland welcomes the elegant Glossy Ibis as they return from southern wintering grounds. These distinctive wading birds, with their deep chestnut bodies and iridescent plumage that shimmers with emerald and violet hues in sunlight, become a treasured sight across our wetlands. Using their long, curved bills, they probe mudflats and shallow waters for crustaceans and small fish. Pickering Creek's protected marshes provide essential habitat for these colonial nesters as they establish breeding territories. Visitors can often spot small groups feeding together, their prehistoric silhouettes cutting striking figures against the spring landscape—a testament to the Chesapeake's vital role in supporting migratory bird populations.



Patrick Carney

7. Wool Grass (*Scirpus cyperinus*)

Wool Grass stands as a vital cornerstone of Pickering Creek's freshwater wetlands. This native sedge grows in dense clumps reaching 4-6 feet tall, crowned with distinctive woolly, rusty-brown seed heads that dance in spring and summer breezes. Beyond its visual appeal, Wool Grass performs critical ecological functions by filtering pollutants from water, stabilizing shorelines against erosion, and providing nesting material for birds and small mammals. Its robust root systems create underwater habitat for aquatic invertebrates, while its seeds offer essential nutrition for waterfowl and songbirds through fall and winter. As climate change alters precipitation patterns, these resilient wetland plants become increasingly important for both flood mitigation and drought resilience.



8. Blue-gray Gnatcatcher (*Poliptila caerulea*)

The Blue-gray Gnatcatcher returns to Pickering Creek each spring, announcing its presence with a thin, wheezy song. This diminutive songbird—barely larger than a hummingbird—sports elegant blue-gray plumage above and white underparts, with males featuring a distinctive black eyebrow during breeding season. Watch for their constant motion as they flit through shrubs and trees, flicking their long white-edged tails while hunting insects. Masters of architecture, these birds construct exquisite cup nests of plant fibers and spider silk, camouflaged with lichens. Their arrival in April signals spring's true awakening across our woodlands and wetland edges.



Patrick Carney

9. Indigo Bunting (*Passerina cyanea*)

The Indigo Bunting transforms Pickering Creek's meadows and woodland edges each spring with breathtaking color. Males arrive wearing brilliant electric-blue plumage that seems to capture sunlight itself, while females sport a more subdued brown with subtle blue hints on wings and tail. These remarkable songbirds are nocturnal migrants, navigating thousands of miles by reading the night sky's celestial patterns. Studies show they orient themselves using star positions, particularly the North Star, during their long journeys from Central America. Listen for the male's cheerful, paired phrases ringing from prominent perches as they establish territories. Their seed-rich diet makes our carefully managed meadows perfect habitat for these spectacular but often overlooked spring/summer residents.



Patrick Carney

10. Little Wood Satyr (*Megisto cymela*)

As spring unfolds across Pickering Creek's meadows, the Little Wood Satyr emerges as one of our most charming, yet often overlooked butterflies. This delicate woodland-edge specialist dances through grassy areas with a distinctive bobbing flight, its soft brown wings adorned with striking eyespots ringed in yellow. Unlike showier butterflies, these modest beauties



Mary Helen Gillen

prefer dappled shade and meadow edges where their caterpillars thrive on native grasses. Watch for their gentle presence from May through July, especially during morning hours when they flit close to the ground, momentarily landing to reveal their exquisite spotted pattern before continuing their graceful journey through the vibrant spring landscape.

11. Snapping Turtle (*Chelydra serpentina*)

As winter's grip loosens on Maryland wetlands, ancient survivors stir beneath the mud. Common Snapping Turtles emerge from torpor—their winter dormancy state—where they've survived for months with minimal oxygen and dramatically slowed metabolism. These prehistoric-looking reptiles, which can live over 100 years, gradually increase activity as waters warm. Their massive shells, often algae-covered and resembling submerged rocks, become visible as they bask along shorelines. Though typically docile underwater, these powerful creatures deserve respectful distance during spring courtship and nesting season when females travel surprising distances to lay eggs. Their awakening marks a vital seasonal milestone—the return of one of our watershed's most important scavengers and eldest inhabitants.

